

BRINGING LIFE-GIVING WATER TO PADAVIYA, SRI LANKA

Mission Team Members:

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Background

Holding up a glass of water, she asked, "If I were to offer you this glass of water on a hot day, would you drink it?" To which the audience responded with a resounding "Yes". She continued "But if I were to offer you this glass of water containing sediments and arsenic, would you drink it?" Those were the opening questions of Sr Milani's presentation. A presentation she made for her Course Performance Task during the 1st "Learn English in an International Community" programme* held in Singapore in 2015.

Sr Milani brought to light the condition of the water in Padaviya, Sri Lanka. Studies conducted by independent research institutions have found the water in Padaviya to be contaminated with sediments and a high level of arsenic and silica, the latter being a mineral used in pesticides. Consumption of the water over the long term exposes one to high risk of contracting kidney disease, a disease that not only affects the patient but his/her family as well.

As we listened to her presentation, we felt compelled that something had to be done to improve the quality of the drinking water in Padaviya.

Mission Journey – The Preparation

In October 2016, the Mission team came together for a crash course at Restful Waters. We learnt about the BioSand Filter system and the process of building one. We were given hands-on practice which included washing sand, drilling pipes and assembling parts.

From the date of the training to the arrival in Sri Lanka, we were in contact with Fr Kelum, Sr Francine and Sr Lela in Sri Lanka. Fr Kelum, Parish Priest at Padaviya helped to coordinate with local residents and gave instructions to ensure that preparation such as washing of sand and gravel was completed and ready for use by the time the team arrived.

It was an anxious time for all of us as we relied only on emails to receive information about the site, give instructions and co-ordinate the groundwork. None of us have been to Sri Lanka and we did not know what to expect. It was also our maiden effort at physically building a water filtration system.

Mission Journey – The Mission

On 15 November, we arrived in Padaviya. Meeting Fr Kelum and the Sisters in community brought us a lot of comfort. Fr Kelum had done all the preparation work as we had requested and more. What joy it was to see the actual site where the filtration system was to be located. How happy we were to see all the sand and gravel washed and ready for use. From our experience of washing sand, to say it is a tedious and time-consuming task is a gross understatement. With our hearts at ease, we set off with Fr Kelum to the hardware store to purchase the 1,000-litre water tank, water pipes, iron nails, electric drill and other materials necessary for the job.

Early next morning we were greeted by Fr Kelum, the Good Shepherd Sisters, and an enthusiastic group of mostly young men and ladies. Many were army personnel interested to learn about the filtration system. Their intention was to learn and replicate the system in other areas of Padaviya so that more families can access and benefit clean water.

We began the day by explaining the system, how it works and why it is the most suitable system, in terms of cost and maintenance, for rural areas such as Padaviya. In addition, information on maintaining the system was also provided. This set background and context on understanding and accepting the system. With the buy-in, installation works began thereafter.



Our aim was to transfer knowledge to the people in Padaviya. This would enhance their confidence and enable them to build more filtration systems to benefit more villagers. Hence, we were encouraged by the good turn-out, and more importantly, the involvement of the army personnel who would commit to help build more systems. Even female residents were interested to know if smaller systems can be constructed for their home.

The enthusiasm, team-work, skill of the plumber, and manpower from the army helped make light work. By lunch time the system was fully installed. This is an incredibly speedy completion. What an accomplishment!





Early this year, Sr Lela of Padaviya community sent the water to a Government Agency for testing. The result? **“Good Water”**. This has brought much joy to the community and to the team. With the BioSand Filtration system providing clean, non-toxic water, we hope that the risk of kidney failure will be drastically reduced.

Mission Journey – The Experience

The Mission Journey had been a joyful and enriching one – that which brings life-giving water, and offers hope to the people for better health and better lives for generations to come. We pray that the success of this first filtration system will encourage the installation of more such systems in areas where clean drinking water is inaccessible.

“The right to water is essential for the survival of persons and decisive for the future of humanity... each day – each day! – a thousand children die from water-related illnesses and millions of persons consume polluted water.” Pope Francis

Together we can do something - share knowledge, build simple and effective systems - to bring clean drinking water to those who need it.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to:

Mr Roger Tan for his professional advice and training in the construction of the BioSand Filter System.

Fr Kelum for his zeal, dedication and hands-on involvement without which the project would not have been possible.

The Good Shepherd Sisters in Sri Lanka, especially Sr Francine for welcoming us and supporting us in our Mission Trip; Sr Euphrasia for accompanying us throughout our journey; and Sr Felicia and her community for their hospitality and delicious meal which made the day even more memorable.

* The “Learn English in an International Community” is a wholistic programme organised by Good Shepherd Convent Restful Waters, Singapore. Besides English lessons, participants attend workshops such as Presentation Skills and Report Writing. They also experience living in an international community and Good Shepherd Partnership in Mission. If you are interested to know more/participate in this programme, please write to melina.restfulwater@gmail.com